



April 1, 2025
Senator Kunesh, Chair
Senate Education Finance Committee Members
75 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kunesh and Members:

My name is Tammy Bengtson and I am the Executive Director at St. Cloud Math and Science Academy.

As you consider SF2255, the Governor's proposed budget, I want to call your attention to the proposed deeply problematic cuts to chartered public school students. These cuts include reductions to special education funding which will hurt our current program which already needs more staff than we can find to apply for positions. St. Cloud Math and Science Academy is a K-8 school with approximately 10% of our student population qualifying for special education services. The disability areas include, autism, specific learning disabilities, speech and language disabilities, developmental disabilities and emotional and behavioral disabilities. Our school serves more than 90% of students from low-income households and about 75% of students who are learning the English language (English Learners). Our students need additional support after school and in the summer in addition to their special education services.

Our school opened in 2014. I was hired in July of 2014, to have a school ready to start in August 2014. Needless to say, it was a lot of work that summer. I am proud of what our school has accomplished since 2014. Our founding board wanted our school to address the needs of many English Language Learners who they felt were not getting served properly in the home district 742 public schools. I compared the results of the same grade levels of English learners at St. Cloud Math and Science Academy and St. Cloud Public School District in 2024. While 16.5 % of English learners met grade standards in Reading at St. Cloud Math and Science academy only 5.8% met grade standards in the St. Cloud district schools. While 21.3% of English learners met grade standards in Math at St. Cloud Math and Science Academy, only 6.7 % met grade standards in the St. Cloud district school board's schools.

Our students attend school regularly. In 2023, our students' attendance rate was 86.3% compared to the state attendance of 74.5% and St. Cloud Public school's attendance rate was 65.3%.

Last school year, our charter school was named a high -quality charter school. In order to be chosen, a charter school needs to demonstrate vigorous school methodology and be identified through the methodology that underscores the school's student achievement and growth. In addition to growth, we need to demonstrate proficiency in school compliance with requirements for MDE submissions and financial health. Any cuts from the State of MN would interrupt our budgeting and financial health to the detriment of our students.

As you put forth your Education Finance Omnibus bill, we respectfully urge you to protect this critical state funding for charter school students during this challenging time. Our students need your support now more than ever. Our charter school serves a disproportionately higher percentage of at-risk students than the state average. The Governor's education finance proposal will make it even more difficult to provide the systems of support that these students need to be successful. Please do not balance the budget at the expense of at-risk students most in need of support.

Sincerely,

Tammy Bengtson
Executive Director

St. Cloud Math and Science Academy